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ABSTRACT

Ideas to be understood and to be remembered must be organized. To organize ideas the reader must recognize the relationship of the parts of the ideas, to one another and to the whole. The reader with no orderly set of the ideas presented on the printed page cannot carry on a dialogue with the author and profit from the reading experience. What did the author say (WDAS) is a technique for reading skill development that maintains a systematic group approach while accommodating individual needs. For the learner, WDAS is a way of discovering how to read actively, organize, recall and understand ideas, and effectively write summary, outline, or precise statements of what has been read. For the instructor, WDAS is a teaching technique interwoven with continuous and contiguous diagnosis. In WDAS students are asked to read an article within a designated time limit and then answer in writing a single question: "What did the author say?" Each answer is shared with the other students in the class, who score each answer by consensus using a scale of one to ten. Teaching of specific techniques is determined by the apparent weaknesses. The process is repeated until the WDAS system for study-reading is internalized by the students. (TO)

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"What Did the Author Say?"
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A paper presented to the Eighth Annual Conference
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"What Did the Author Say?" A technique for learning to organize, understand and remember ideas

Ideas to be understood and to be remembered must be organized. To organize ideas for remembering, the reader must recognize the relationship of the parts of the ideas, one to each other and to the whole.

This is what students study-reading are trying to do. Yet, it is not uncommon to find students who feel they understand what they read while they are reading, but are unable to recall or apply the information gathered. It is even not uncommon to find students who can't remember they were study-reading although their eyes followed the lines of print and their fingers turned the pages regularly. Such students are not only passive readers, they are non-organizers. They are the ones who can be heard plaintively saying, "I can't remember a thing I have read," or "I can't concentrate."

Passive reading and non-organizing are not two problems, but one. Simply stated, the reader with no orderly set of the ideas presented on the printed page cannot carry on a dialogue with the author, and profit from the reading experience.

"What did the author say?" is a technique for reading skill development that maintains a systematic group approach while accommodating individual needs. For the learner. it is a way of discovering how to read actively, organize, recall and understand ideas, and effectively write summary, outline, or precis statements of what has been read. For the instructor, it is a teaching technique interwoven with continuous and conterminous diagnosis.

Procedure

I. First Session

1. Students are asked to study-read a one-thousand word article, and to be prepared to recall what was read. (Strang, 5)
2. A time limit for the study-reading is established, usually no more than ten minutes.
3. Following study-reading, students are asked to answer in writing the one question, "What did the author say?" Reference to the article during the writing period is discouraged.
4. Special instructions on how to study-read, to write answers are not given. Students are encouraged to use the methods they usually apply when studying and writing answers to essay test questions.

II. Second Session

1. A copy of all answers received from class members is distributed to each student. The copy is a true reproduction except for omission of student names. (Melnik, 4)
2. The criterion answer is shared with the students by use of a transparency on the overhead projector or by inclusion with the class answers as distributed.
3. Students are asked to score by concensus each of the answers using a scale of one to ten. (Figure 1)

III. Third Session

1. Instruction is given the class group, using the same article originally read, in:

a. Prereading study materials.
b. Using contextual clues for vocabulary development.
c. Identifying paragraph functions.
d. Recognizing main ideas and significant details and the relationship between them.
e. Distinguishing between necessary and probable inferences.
f. Drawing conclusions.
g. Organizing ideas around topics for remembering and understanding.
h. Paraphrasing the author.
i. Writing an effective answer to the question, "What did the author say?"

2. Skill instruction as necessary is presented hierarchially in more than one class period, and may include articles other than the original. Selective skills are taught in successive sessions as appropriate for the class group and are integrated when possible.

IV. Fourth and Subsequent Sessions

1. Students continue to read one-thousand word articles and to prepare written answers. (See IV-5)
2. Criterion answers are shared with the students, either before answers are submitted to the instructor or at the following class session when the scored papers are returned.
3. Instruction in the techniques of reading as given for the Third Session are continued, repeated, clarified, or extended, in both large and small group meetings.
4. At intervals, class answers are shared with the group as described for the Second Session. Although answers are not identified by name, the students tend to feel the improved answers show others that they can, and are, doing better.
5. After a respectable amount of practice, students are asked to include in their written answers analysis, evaluation, and discussion of the usability and benefit of the information gathered through reading, and to give examples of possible applications of that information.

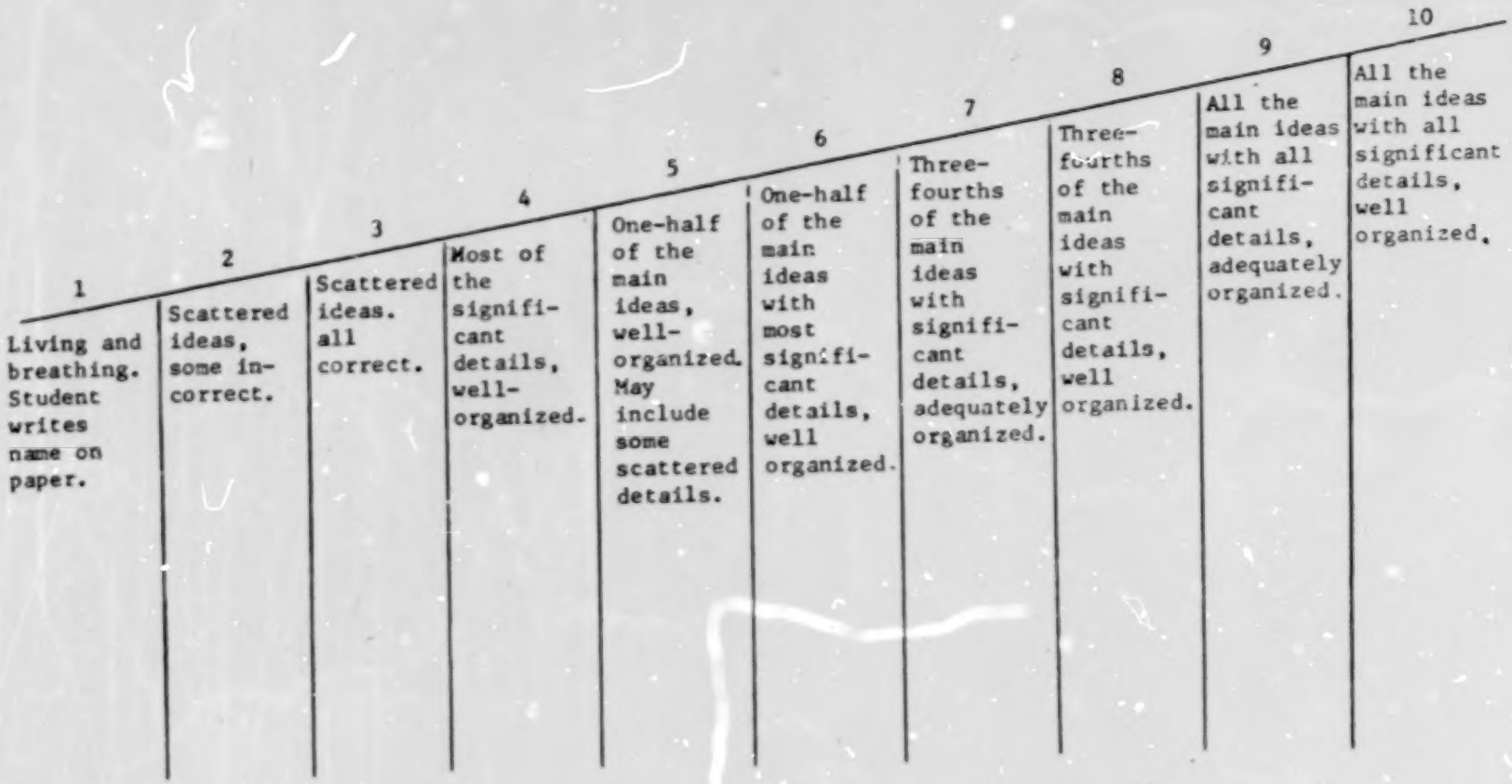
V. Culminating Activity

1. Students are asked to apply the techniques and skills learned to study-read an assignment in a course textbook other than that used in the reading class. Prior to this, they are encouraged to begin using the technique when studying.

Figure 1.

Scoring Scale for use with "What did the author say?"

A score of 1 point is the minimum which can be earned by a student, and no student is to earn less than 1 point. A score of 10 points is the maximum. Scores appearing to fall between number values on the scale are scored at the lower value. Scores are determined by comparing the ideas expressed in the student answer with those included in the criterion answer.


1
Living and breathing. Student writes name on paper.
2
Scattered ideas, some incorrect.
3
Scattered ideas. all correct.
4
Most of the significant details, well-organized.
5
One-half of the main ideas, well-organized. May include some scattered details.
6
One-half of the main ideas with most significant details, well organized.
7
Three-fourths of the main ideas with significant details, adequately organized.
8
Three-fourths of the main ideas with significant details, well organized.
9
All the main ideas with all significant details, adequately organized.
10
All the main ideas with all significant details, well organized.

Discussion

Students who have used WDAS say they have enjoyed and profited from the experience, and their demonstrated improvement in earned scores tends to give substance to the comments. In our experience, scores tend to be at the lower end of the grading scale for the first try, improvement is noticeable after the third try, and in fewer than a dozen practice sessions, the scores tend to move to the upper end of the scale.

Class scoring of the first set of papers is a judgmental experience essential for successful learning with WDAS, as well as for the serendipity of developing student awareness of the need for proofreading. Closer student attention to the mechanics of writing and spelling is likely once students have had the opportunity to see their writing with a reader's eye.

Teaching during the third and subsequent sessions should be simple, direct, and specific, and in part determined by the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals evidenced in the written answers. It should emphasize reading as a thinking skill and a process of identifying in the beginning, and a process of interpreting and evaluating ideas later.

An important component of this approach is the specificity of the grading scale. It shows the learner what he is to do and at what level he is to perform on successive tries, and it is designed to provide a measure of small improvement. For all readers, those convinced of their inadequacy to learn, as well as the confident, that small regular movement up the scale is singularly rewarding.

Exposure to skill development does not necessarily assure transfer of learning; it must be taught. (Ahrendt,1) The culminating activity for WDAS provides the student the opportunity for transfer of learning in a useful way.

It has been the purpose of this paper to describe one approach to teaching study-reading skills. The procedural guidelines suggested are practical and result from a synthesis of classroom experiences, but they should be viewed as a flexible framework to be adapted creatively to the realities of each particular classroom.

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